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SCHOOLS

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DPS Start Times Exploratory Discussion

Currently, Denver Public Schools serves more than 92,000 students in 207 schools across the district. As a district that deeply believes that schools are the unit of change and should have the autonomy to make academic and operational decisions that are best for their school community, we allow schools to request a change to their bell schedules. Today, we have 20 different bell times throughout the district.

In 2016, Denver Public School conducted an exploratory discussion around a system-wide shift of start times for high schools. In addition to discussing the proposal with our academic, operational and family and community engagement staff, we included our secondary principals, athletics, accountability, research and evaluation and our student board of education in the discussion. Ultimately, while many potential benefits to a district-wide later start time for high schools were identified, we decided not to implement a system-wide shift at this time because of the unique practices and needs of our district.

Background: Why Conduct a Start Times Investigation?

“a substantial body of research has now demonstrated that delaying school start times is an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss and has a wide range of potential benefits to students with regard to physical and mental health, safety, and academic achievement.”

-- [American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement](#)

Our Denver Plan 2020 set the Goal of Supporting the Whole Child:

- Healthy
- Supported
- Engaged
- Challenged
- Safe

Socially & Emotionally Intelligence, Shifting to later start times was proposed as a way for the district to better support the whole child for our high school students. Research has shown that adequate sleep promotes physical and mental health, reduces risk of obesity and increases one's ability to stay focused and retain information. Meeting one's sleep needs is shown to reduce risk of car crashes as well as incidence of depression, anxiety and other social-emotional impairments that are can be prominent in sleep deprived individuals.

THE ASK WE EXPLORED “What it would take” for DPS to adjust start times to promote healthier amounts of sleep for secondary students?

Summary Findings of our Exploratory Discussion

- **DPS has several key differences** from other districts that have moved to later start times:
 - As we work to accelerate the improvement of academic outcomes for our students, we are implementing numerous reform priorities as a district, such as early education, teacher leadership, and equity. Each priority requires significant change management. Adding another system-wide shift would challenge the limited amount of change capacity we have available and would need to be a top priority for our entire district community.



- Philosophy of Autonomy
 - DPS believes strongly that schools are the unit of change and that school communities should have the flexibility to make operational and academic decisions that are best for their students. DPS schools have flexibility in determining their schedules for the start and end times of their school days. This has resulted in a large dispersion of bell times among schools. Currently we have 20 different start times across 207 schools. Given school autonomy, in order to implement a system-wide shift in start times, DPS leadership would have to mandate the change from the top-down and out of alignment with our beliefs.
- Potentially increased burden on our students living in poverty and English language learners
 - Later release times can limit a student's ability to meet their after school responsibilities (such as sibling care and wage earning jobs). We know that our students living in poverty are most likely to have such responsibilities be most impacted by a shift.
 - A shift to later times would require either a later release time or a shortened school day. A shorter day would adversely impact the scheduling of English Language Development classes.
- Flexible Start Times/Non-Tiered Busing
 - Many districts have achieved later secondary starts by flipping existing 'tiers' of bussing (i.e. Elementary schools switch to start early [7:30] & high schools start later [8:30]). This is not a readily available option to DPS due to the substantial dispersion of our current bell schedules (as mentioned above).
- Choice/Enrollment Zones
 - Enrollment Zones and DPS's strategies to achieving great schools in every neighborhood result in increased routing complexity for DPS Transportation affecting their ability to accommodate wide sweeping bell time changes.
- Athletics
 - DPS believes in supporting a strong athletic program. A adjustment to later times would have a impact on athlete participation, field and gym availability, coach and teacher availability, and overall reduction in sports levels being offered. This would require shifting team practices to the AM time vs PM.
- Transportation
 - Impacts to Transportation's Efficiency, Students First & Equity Objectives – Increases in demand of service during the peak bell times of 7:30-9am and 3-4pm puts significant strain on Transportation resources limiting the department's ability to serve the needs of all schools, and athletics within acceptable levels of efficiency and customer service.